

The History of New Literacies and Application of Twitter in the Classroom M.M.Emmons

Bell and Touraine's research from the 1970's which documented the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial paradigm. Instead of manufacturing goods, information and services were the new products. Science and technology were needed to create these new goods, not just labor.

Castells (1996): two Industrial Revolutions. The first, at the end of the 18th Century, replaced hand tools with machines. Humans did not have to do as much physical labor, and work could be more efficient and productive as a machine could hypothetically work faster and mass produce an item instead of limited handcrafted items. The second, Industrial Revolution, around 100 years later, saw the discovery of electricity, internal combustion, chemicals, and new communication through the telegraph and telephone. We see these innovations continue in our modern times as our devices have become more complex and smaller.

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) point out that while there is a physical "limit" to cyberspace in the sense of server space, there is really no limit to what can be added to or "consumed" in cyberspace. Unlike the physical world, information and data cannot be spent by one person and therefore not present for another.

So let's look at an example of how cyberspace and the digital world have changed the way we do something. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) refer to Bezos' 2nd phase automation when looking at how new technologies allow us to do something in a different manner. 1st phase automation is using technology to make a job more efficient, but the task is still the same, such as using a scanner to price items at a checkout counter. However, an example of 2nd phase automation might be as simple as purchasing a book on Amazon.com.

We may not realize that the online actions of book browsing offer opportunities for interaction and "real life" applications for critique and review of novels. There may also be times when we don't make connections between a student's online experiences and how those experiences translate into face to face skills. For example, Hawisher et al, (2004) state that perhaps chatting online via Instant Messaging might improve a student's sense of dialogue for classroom discussions.

Bruce (1998) helps us understand that our "new" literacies are actually part of a rich history of how humans have communicated with each other. Our symbol system that we use currently has roots back in prehistoric times to the symbols painted on the walls of caves. New technologies in past times opened doors to different types of communication. For example, once people began to write, permanent documents made education a possibility not to mention the whole study of history (Bruce, 1998).

The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse shares Reeves' definition of Literacy 2.0 as "the social and technological phenomenon that enables users to generate content, interact, and share information across borders" (1).

One student comments on the easy use of Sparknotes to “read” a book. He understands that he’s cheating himself, but there aren’t enough hours in the day to read the whole book when he could get the main points in 5 minutes.

Another student comments on the difference between an online community that allowed role playing, creating, and equality as opposed to school with grades, hierarchical relationships, and constant rules. Their publication calls to attention the fact that non-school writing, like texting, blogs, Facebook, etc. allow for a collaborative experience not common in school. It challenges teachers to build “connections between non-school and school based literacy practices” (16).

NCTE (2008) helps to further explain and define what makes the new literacy so different: a visual and design element to websites, variety of media in online documents allows for music, images, words, and video to merge together in one text, a culture that allows for interaction and discussion more than a “read-only” approach. Media like Twitter allow these conversations and connections to continue outside of the classroom and with members of the community. As writers, students can take on many identities, such as characters from a book, and therefore connect more strongly with the characters and the ideas presented in the book. Digital literacy connects students and teachers to others around the world. We are no longer limited in our communication to those people who live in our location.

Why does it seem that some teachers or administrators are reluctant to embrace new technology? O’Brien (2010) says that for some people, their experience of computers is based on the past when computers were costly and programs not readily available. These people, stuck in the past, are not aware that the cost of computers has been reduced, that many teachers are now finding digital media as supplemental to print, and that Internet access is becoming more available to all people allowing them to interact in new ways. There seems to be debate in how to name those who are comfortable with technology and the new literacies and those who are not. O’Brien (2010) states that some people use age to talk about digital immigrants, or people who were not born during a time when technology was used frequently. These are the people who remember how we located information B.G.-- Before Google. Others argue that age should not be part of the definition. The only consensus is that people are either visitors or residents when it comes to technology use. Something that may help reluctant teachers consider the new literacies is visiting YouTube and viewing ‘Did you Know 3.0,’ which shows how our world has changed and how technologies that didn’t exist are now ruling (O’Brien, 2010). Another suggested video is “Web 2.0 . . . The Machines are Us/ing Us”, which cleverly illustrates the difference between hypertext and pen and paper communication (O’Brien, 2010).

The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (2009) offers some practical ways to stay informed of current technologies as well as steps to encourage others to start experiencing and thinking about the new literacies: exploring online resources for the organizations you belong to like the NCTE or the IRA, finding a mentor who uses technology and will encourage your growth, and joining Twitter or another social network that would allow you to connect with other coaches and share information. There were also several coaching blogs that were listed.

O'Brien (2010) offers similar suggestions, especially to help "old dogs" learn "new tricks." He suggests following blogs, saving and sharing bookmarks on Delicious, making a student the "tech wizard" of your classroom, and introducing yourself to the Technology Integration Specialist. One of the most practical ideas was picking one technology to start small with and use frequently.

One particular new media that is of interest to me is Twitter, or microblogging. I think that it is "short" enough to encourage a teacher to write every day as a blog might be intimidating since one thinks they need to write an essay. I think Twitter appeals to students who like to be concise, and for those students who would write every piece of information hoping something is correct, it forces them to be concise.

Reinhardt, Ebner, Beham, & Costa (2009) explored the usefulness of microblogging for fast exchanges of information. One aspect of communicating via Twitter that interested them was that you can hashtag a tweet. This allows information sharing concerning a specific topic or event to be more organized and shared more quickly. They also pointed out how Twitter might be beneficial in large room presentations or lectures. Reinhardt et. al (2009) note that these large room learning situations do not generally allow for much interaction. They see Twitter as a way to allow feedback from the audience during the lecture, it relieves any stress one might have to ask a question, and increases participation of the audience.

Besides using Twitter in a professional manner, Twitter is a way to foster relationships concerning teachers' or students' life outside the classroom. Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009) looked to Twitter to help create social interactions for their online classes in order to build the interactions and relationships that will foster stronger education, especially critical when students and teachers are not meeting face to face. "When faculty stay in touch with students through formal and informal communication and dialogue, students report that it helps them get through the rough days and keep on working (Dunlap and Lowenthal, 2009, p. 130)."

As I did the research, I noticed that scholarly articles were beginning to address digital literacy. Many, like my inquiry paper, were starting with the history and rationale behind starting the discussion of how we change to fit the digital age. I was surprised that there were not more articles about Twitter's use in the classroom. Many articles listed several social networking options, but did not explicitly share ways to use these technologies. However, contemporary magazines (mostly online like Wired), blogs, and other sites were full of teacher ideas for Twitter. It made me wonder if the Internet has changed the way scholarly journals will be produced as their competition is now online. Information is easier to find and locate, and the people writing it seem knowledgeable. I would imagine that scholarly journals will soon be more specific in how certain sites and programs can be used in the classroom in order to catch up with this gap of information.